Areté

CENTRE FOR MISSIONARY LEADERSHIP

A work of the Missionaries of God's Love

Mission in the Early Church

Theological Foundations of Mission 2

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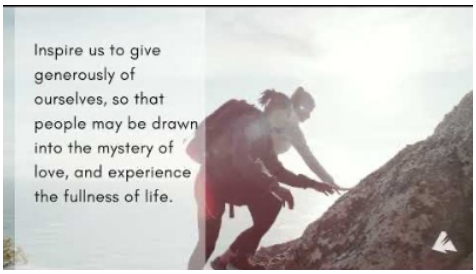

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Introduction to Lecture 2

- Last week – we looked at the scriptural foundation of mission, by looking at scripture as salvation history, and through the lens of mission
- This week – we will look at the early church's mission in 3 moments:
  - Earliest picture we have of mission – the Jerusalem Church in Acts 2
  - The rapid expansion of the church from c. AD 100 to 313
  - A snapshot of mission in 4th century Jerusalem - a hinge-point in history: at the birth of Christendom

3

How did the early church engage in mission?
How did Christianity grow so rapidly in the first centuries?
And what can we learn from it for today?

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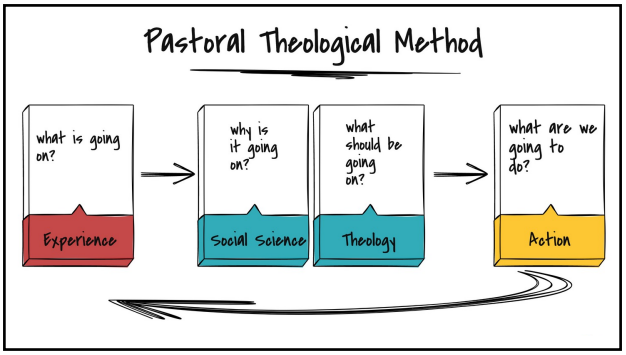

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Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

6

Elements in Acts 2:42-47

- Apostles' Teaching (*didache*)
- Fellowship (koinonia)
- Breaking of the bread and the prayers

- Wonders and signs
- Together and all things in common
- Sold their possessions and distributed them
- Attending the temple together
- Breaking bread in their homes
- Praising God and having favour with all the people
- And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

7

The Sociocultural Context of the Roman Empire

- What does "sociocultural" mean?
- Urbanisation of the empire – resulting in social dislocation
- The Romans generally let local peoples continue their particular worship practices
- Ever present threats to unity of empire – look to a 'religio' to unify the people
- Jewish diaspora paved the way for Christian expansion
  - May have made up as much as 7% of the Empire
  - Gentiles attracted to the Jewish faith (God-fearers)

8

The Sociocultural Context of the Roman Empire II

- Two epidemics contributed to destablisation of the empire (165-180 AD, and 251 AD)
- Sociologist Rodney Stark:
  - Squalid, high mortality rates, ethnic rivalries, hatreds and strangers, could end up homeless
  - People looking for relief and hope in these circumstances

9

Missionaries in the East

- 3 types of "missionary activity" in the East
  - Evangelization through 'ordinary people' – merchants, traders, immigrants
  - Early Syrian ascetics > monastic movement
  - Missionary individuals such as:
    - Addai – Edessa in Syria
    - Tatian to Arbela (Adiabene in Persian empire)
    - Gregory the illuminator > baptizes Armenian king c. AD 300
    - St Thomas and Pantaenus > India

10

Missionaries in the West

- Evangelists – itinerant, poor, not large no.s
- Bishops – e.g. Ignatius, Irenaeus, Polycarp
- Apologists – writing to address objections, animosities to Christianity
- Teachers – theologians – but trying to evangelise

11

Apologists and the True Philosophy

- Justin – continuities between philosophy and Christian belief
- Clement of Alexandria: "For philosophy was to the Greek world what the Law was to the Hebrews, a tutor escorting them to Christ".
- Setting up schools

12

Martyrdom

- Local persecutions
- 3 Major Persecutions – Empire wide, by Decius in 250, Valerian in 257 and Diocletian in 303.
- E.g. of Perpetua and her companions in Carthage (North Africa)
- E.g. Of Saturus the catechist
- "we become more numerous every time we are hewn down by you: the blood of Christians is the seed".
- Everett Ferguson: the martyrdoms were the "best advertising available"

13

The Primary Way: Via Relationships

- Existing networks – family, acquaintances, business associates, Jewish diaspora/God-fearers
- Households
- Urban movement
- Created a new social network
- Middle to upper class but disaffected – God-fearers, women, Hellenized Jews
- Especially role of women – Gospel attractive to women; evangelised their husbands; hosted house churches, were martyrs (Perpetua)

14

A Communal Witness

- Commitment to life together
- Egalitarian – symbolized by the kiss of peace across social divides
- Hope when people tempted to despair
- Peace and patience
- Joy
- Transformed characters
- Sense of belonging
- Care for the sick and needy, victims of the epidemics

15

Breakout: Implications

- What can we learn from the picture of the early Church in Acts 2 for mission today?
- What can we learn about mission today from the way the Church grew in the first three hundred years of Christianity?

16

Conclusions

- Continuity between the Acts 2 picture and the ordinary witness of people in relationship and of the community as the driving force of mission
- Combination of teaching, fellowship, liturgy, sharing and care for the disadvantaged was potent for forming a particular (a "peculiar") people
- Mission is rooted in baptism and lived out in a Christian community.
- The role of specific people – evangelists, teachers, itinerant missionaries etc – is secondary to the witness of the Christian community.
- Wonders and signs?
- Favour with all the people > stance to the culture?

17

The Catechumenate(s)

- Some form of catechumenate began in the 3rd and possibly even the late second century – to ensure a thorough formation
- Refined and developed in the 4th century as the empire became nominally Christian
- Catechumens = people receiving instruction in Christian faith prior to baptism

18

Early Catechesis (c. AD 100 – c. AD 300)

- Catechesis = teaching
- *Didache* and *Epistle of Barnabas* c. AD 100 – "Two ways"
- Ignatius of Antioch – bishop to approve people for baptism
- C. AD 150 Irenaeus – salvation-history approach to catechesis
- Clement and Origen (late 2nd early third c.) - scriptural content, but also structurally-based on the philosophical schools

19

4th Century Changes in Mission

- In 313 Christianity becomes the religion of the Roman Empire (Constantine)
- Now advantageous to be a Christian
- Monastic movement – in the midst of diluted commitment, monasteries were an attempt to recapture the intense communal way of life, and modelled on the martyrs (repeated throughout Church history since – radical movements attempting to recapture original community)
- Attempts to ensure a more thorough preparation of would-be converts for baptism (the establishment of the catechumenate)

20

A Case Study: the Jerusalem Catechumenate (4th Century) Background

- Jerusalem had been almost destroyed in AD 70
- AD 132 it was razed to the ground in retaliation for Jewish uprising
- Re-named Aelia Capitolina – Roman forum and capitol built on the ruins of the Jewish Temple
- Helena (Emperor Constantine's mother visits in AD 326) builds churches – Holy Sepulchre, Bethlehem, Mt. of Olives
- Pilgrims start to come to Jerusalem
- Becomes a place of liturgical influence

21

A Case Study: the Jerusalem Catechumenate (4th Century) Bishop Cyril

- Bishop about AD 350
- Difficult times – wake of Council of Nicaea. He is deposed, restored and exiled several times
- Dies in 386
- We have 24 catecheses which he gave, probably about the time he became bishop. Probably carefully prepared. Presented each year
- The catecheses consist of:
  - A Procatechesis or introduction
  - 18 catecheses to those preparing for baptism (in Lent)
  - 5 mystagogical catecheses (after baptism)

22

A Case Study: the Jerusalem Catechumenate (4th Century)

- First Sunday of Lent – Bishop spoke to witnesses to see if the catechumens were of good character
- Then they were accepted and they become 'competentes' – in immediate preparation phase prior to baptism
- Every morning through Lent – two hours of catechesis from the bishop – on 'all the scriptures' so maybe a salvation history approach? (we don't have any records of this)
- But also on doctrinal content – based on a creed (not the Nicene creed, but close); these are the 18 catechetical lectures we have
- The 'Faithful' could come, but not the catechumens
- Exorcisms accompanied the catecheses each day too

23

A Case Study: the Jerusalem Catechumenate (4th Century) The Procatechesis

- Possibly given on 1st Sunday of Lent – to whole congregation? Clearly addressed to the *competentes*
- Begins: "Already has the fragrance of the Holy Spirit refreshed you; you are already at the entrance hall of the King's house; may you be brought into it by the King!" PCat. 1
- Stresses the need to be sincere in motives: "Honesty of purpose makes you called: for though the body be here, if the mind be away, it avails nothing". PCat. 1
- Can be baptised but not enlightened – e.g. of Simon Magus "His body he dipped in water, but admitted not the Spirit to illuminate his heart. His body went down and came up; but his soul was not buried together with Christ nor with Him raised". PCat. 2

24

A Case Study: the Jerusalem Catechumenate (4th Century) The Procatechesis

- Cyril addresses mixed motives: "Perhaps you come on another ground. A man may be wishing to court a woman, and on that account come here, and the same applies to women. Or, a slave often wishes to please his master, or one friend another [by asking for baptism]".
- I avail myself of this angler's bait, and receive you, as one who has indeed come with an unsound purpose, but are saved by a good hope. You did not know where you were coming, or what net was catching you. You are within the Church's nets, submit to be taken; flee not, for Jesus would secure you, not to make you die, but by death to make you live". Pcat 5.

25

A Case Study: the Jerusalem Catechumenate (4th Century) The Procatechesis

- Cyril tells them that the catechesis is not like ordinary homilies, because if the ordinary homilies are neglected, they can be "attended to tomorrow".
- These catecheses are like the deep foundations:
  - The Living God
  - Judgment
  - Christ
  - The Resurrection
- And many things follow on from another. Remember what is first, what is second, connect them into a whole if you can

26

A Case Study: the Jerusalem Catechumenate (4th Century) The Catecheses

1. On the purpose of mind necessary for baptism
2. On the power of repentance for the forgiveness of sins
3. On baptism
4. On the ten points of doctrine (intro)
5. On faith
6. On the unity of God
7. On God, the Father
8. On 'Almighty' God
9. On God, the Creator

27

A Case Study: the Jerusalem Catechumenate (4th Century) The Catecheses

10. On one Lord Jesus Christ
11. On the Son of God as only begotten and before all ages
12. On the Incarnation of the Son of God
13. On the Crucifixion and Burial of Christ
14. On the Resurrection, Ascension, and Exaltation of Christ
15. On the Second Coming, Last Judgment and The Kingdom without End
16. On the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who spoke in the Prophets
17. On the Holy Spirit
18. On the Resurrection of the Flesh, the Catholic Church, and the Life Everlasting

28

A Case Study: the Jerusalem Catechumenate (4th Century) Initiation

- The Mystagogical Catecheses (MC) give us a very rich picture of how baptism took place
- Easter vigil – only minimal prior explanation of what was to happen, so explained afterwards (in the MC)

29

A Case Study: the Jerusalem Catechumenate (4th Century) Initiation

1. Entered into a separate baptistery – in outer hall faced West and renounced Satan, all his works, and his pomp
2. Then escorted into the inner chamber of the baptistery
   1. got completely undressed
   2. Anointed with 'exorcised oil' – all over their body
   3. Led to the baptismal pool and asked if you believed in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
   4. Then descended into the water three times
3. Linen garment, and escorted into the anastasis or main body of the Church for the Anointing with chrism by the bishop – forehead, nostrils, breast,
4. Received the Eucharist

30

A Case Study: the Jerusalem Catechumenate (4th Century) The Mystagogical Catecheses

- Mystagogia – Reflection upon the 'Mysteries' the experience of initiation
- Took place in the 'Anastasis' (not the martyrium)
- Monday through Friday of Easter Week

31

A Case Study: the Jerusalem Catechumenate (4th Century) The Mystagogical Catecheses

"I long ago desired, true-born and dearly beloved children of the Church, to discourse to you concerning these spiritual and heavenly Mysteries;

but knowing well, that seeing is far more persuasive than hearing, I waited till this season;

that finding you more open to the influence of my words from this your experience, I might take and lead you to the brighter and more fragrant meadow of this present paradise; especially as ye have been made fit to receive the more sacred Mysteries, having been counted worthy of divine and life-giving Baptism". MC 1

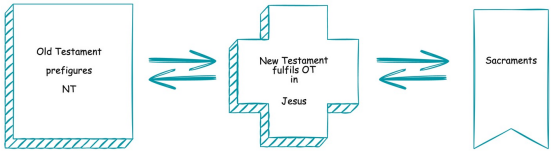
32

A Case Study: the Jerusalem Catechumenate (4th Century) The Mystagogical Catecheses

1. On the Rites Before Baptism
2. On the Rite of Baptism
3. On the Holy Chrism
4. On the Body and Blood of Christ
5. On the Communion rite

33

Cyril's use of scripture & sacrament



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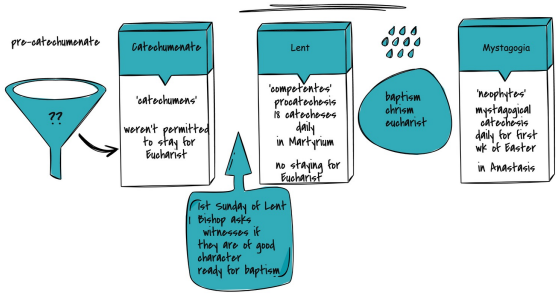
The 4th Century Catechumenate



35

Breakout: Implications

What are the implications of this description of the catechumenate for us today?

36